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## ABSTRACT

In 1970, two of Lynchburg, Virginia's elementary school districts were combined to accomplish court-ordered pupil integration. The Elizabeth Kizer School housed grades K-2 and Dearington School, grades 3-5. Prior to the desegregation order, Kizer's enrollment had been 100 percent white and Dearington's enrollment 100 percent black. In 1989, as part of the Community Accelerated Learning Partnership Schools Project, each of these schools again serves its own area, with pre-kindergarten through grade 5. Kizer is now about 60 percent white, and Dearington is 80 percent black. Area residents frequently head single-parent families and possess limited schooling, skills, or job qualifications. The children often become Chapter 1 clients, are academically frustrated, and tend to drop out, repeating the poverty cycle. At least one-third are high-risk students. To decrease the number of elementary students for whom secondary school success is unlikely, the two schools proposed a strong community involvement component and intensive instructional reprogramming. The project includes the following strategies: (1) mobilizing the entire community around a shared vision of lifelong educational objectives; (2) creating pride by developing unity and purpose; (3) extending the school into neighborhood facilities when necessary; (4) providing outreach services, even to parents of newborns; (5) activating a broadly representative planning council; (6) enlisting the cooperation of the neighboring college, high school, and businesses; and (7) planning specific adult, parenting, and pre-employment opportunities for parents. To accomplish these goals requires a strong, facilitative brand of leadership. (Six references) (MLH)

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THE COMMUNITY ACCELERATED LEARNING PARTNERSHIP SCHOOL

A PRESENTATION BY  
FRED D. GILLISPIE, JR.

TO  
THE SECOND NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON PARENT INVOLVEMENT  
CHARLOTTE, N.C.  
OCTOBER 1-3, 1989

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Lynchburg, Virginia is an industrial and educational center of 70,000 people serving a larger metropolitan population of some 150,000.

In 1970, two of the city's elementary school districts were combined to accomplish court-ordered pupil integration. The Elizabeth Kizer school housed grades K - 2 and Dearington School grades 3 - 5. Prior to that, the Kizer enrollment had been 100% white and Dearington's 100% black. Each served a walk-in area about 1/4 mile wide and 1/2 mile long. Later, as a result of annexation, the Kizer district has since been extended along a corridor about 3 miles long toward the western city limits, and its immediate walk-in area now consists primarily of older homes with older citizens and rental property occupied by students at Lynchburg College, which adjoins this school district. Along this corridor are several apartment complexes, trailer parks, and one residential sub-division. The Dearington area has remained older homes and a subsidized low-rent housing project.

This year, as part of the Community Accelerated Learning Partnership Schools project, each of these two schools ser-

ves its own area, with Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 5. Kizer is about 60% white and Dearington 80% black.

The residents in this area frequently head single parent families. Limited schooling and skills make it difficult for many of these parents to qualify for available jobs. The children frequently become clients of Chapter I programs, are frustrated as they compete in a highly competitive academic environment, and tend to drop out, repeating the poverty cycle. Approximately 1/3 of the students in the project schools are considered "at-risk."

As an article in Kappan (1) recently said, explaining empirical trends in demographic terms does not solve the problems that plague our youngsters. Policies that assume that changes in statistical indicators also reflect changing personal values may do more to cloud understanding than to clarify it.

To decrease the number of elementary students who do not reach a level of academic achievement which makes success in secondary school a likely possibility, we proposed a strong community involvement component in addition to intensive instructional programing. The project includes the following strategies:

- Mobilize the entire community - staff, students, parents, and other community members - around a shared vision of a school which serves the life-long educational needs of the

community. As a writer in NEA Today(2) suggested recently, the school does not become part of a community just by sending notes home or inviting parents to an Open House. Some of the specific things we want to do to build that vision include involving the parents in ways I will enumerate later, develop rules and standards for an orderly, safe, and academically demanding environment, insist on having an excellent faculty, and maintain the momentum by building on strengths and correcting weaknesses. An article a few months ago in the NASSP Bulletin(3) suggests that schools may have become agents for stability rather than visionaries, adapters rather than transformers, and maintainers rather than champions. Such visions require care and nurturing, sharing of rights and responsibilities.

- Create pride by developing a unity of purpose essential to growth and survival of a neighborhood. We found for example, that several governmental and community organizations already had begun working together. The City government had a Neighborhood Services Resource Committee which shared many of the same concerns for the neighborhood that the school felt. This committee joined various local government department representatives with representatives from the neighborhood. We determined that a Neighborhood Watch group also shared concern for the area. We have found, and most places are probably no different, that there is a lot of territorialism in some of these departments. A report from the National Association of State Boards of Education

(4)emphasizes the futility of operating agencies that serve at-risk children and their families in isolation. " Schools alone cannot compensate for the disadvantage created by troubled homes and troubled communities," the report said. "Welfare and social services may momentarily mitigate a crisis, but cannot promise a hopeful future." We see one of our major tasks as building coalitions with these agencies. We believe it is more important to concentrate on working together than on what share of the pie is being obtained by whom.

- Extend the school into neighborhood facilities, if necessary, for space and accessibility. Near Dearington School, for example, are several vacant houses. We are looking at the possibility of using one for before and after school child care and for space for the adult education activities I will describe later. I indicated that the students attending Kizer School are mostly from an area up to three miles away. We are looking at a couple of options for conducting some of the activities at a building in one of the trailer parks or in a building one of the churches built to house woodworking and other activities for adults.
- Provide outreach services, even to parents of new-born, making them part of the school even before their children reach school entrance age. The NEA Today article I mentioned previously reminds us that half of a child's intellect is formed at home before he reaches school. So

are cultural patterns, notions of appropriate behavior, and basic values. We included in the project a community outreach worker, who happens to have been a product of the neighborhood, who worked as a secretary at the school some years back while struggling to complete her college education. Later she was a teacher in the neighborhood. Most recently she had been an assistant principal before coming back in this capacity. An extension of the school system Parent Center is being developed within the project schools to provide parents with assistance they might need to help their students. Besides regular contacts and access, we believe it is important to convey a conviction that all children can learn and to provide information about realistic expectations, and going beyond the regular school day and school year to extend the opportunities students and their parents have to be involved in the learning process. The outreach worker will assist the family in meeting family physical and mental health needs and make referrals to appropriate agencies, even arranging to bring services to the parents and children when possible. She will also be responsible for insuring community access through use of door-to-door contact, telephone, transportation, and newsletters. We see the outreach worker as a provider of help and hope.

- Activate a planning council consisting of staff, parents, older community residents, former students, a school board member who resides in the area, and representatives from

appropriate community agencies. Site-based decision making is an idea about which much has been said, and we were skeptical of just how much authority the school board and central administration would be willing to give up. We have been pleasantly surprised thus far at the support they have shown for this notion. The council provides input on the instructional program and support and direction for the parent and community involvement activities. Mario Fantini, Dean of the School of Education at the University of Massachusetts,(5) suggests a continuum of public involvement in the schools, from clients whose participation is viewed as a privilege, to producers who serve as volunteers, to consumers for whom services are provided, and ultimately as governors who participate in decision-making, evaluation, and accountability. We certainly share his vision of their involvement.

- Enlist the cooperation of the neighboring college, businesses, and high school. As indicated previously, Lynchburg College borders the Kizer school district. Several faculty children attend the school. There are tremendous opportunities, previously largely untapped, for cooperation between the schools and the college. The college students can serve as mentors. Faculty can provide resource expertise. The facilities can be utilized in the instructional and enrichment programs. In a magnanimous gesture, the college is offering scholarships to Kindergarten students enrolled in Kizer and Dearington

schools when they graduate from high school and are otherwise qualified to enroll. Numerous businesses are located within each school's district - banks, convenience stores, medical facilities, restaurants, industries, auto dealerships, the local newspaper plant. We anticipate utilizing the facilities and personnel of these to enrich the instructional program and also to heighten community pride and purpose. Students from the high school can provide help during the school day as part of our organized student assistant program. Older neighborhood youth can be employed to assist with the after-school programs, providing an additional link between the neighborhood families and the schools. It has been shown that helping younger children is very valuable in helping the helpers increase their own appreciation for learning and sense of responsibility.

- Plan specific adult, parenting, and pre-employment opportunities for parents. As I indicated, many of the district's parents are undereducated, inexperienced, and lacking in employable skills. Besides an extension of the Parent Center to provide them help in working with their children, we are providing them opportunities to complete their GED diplomas, Adult Basic Education, or other educational experiences to enrich their own lives as well as those of their families. We have had a group of home economists volunteer their services in providing training in nutrition, sewing, and other domestic skills. We anticipate providing help with financial planning and preparation

for Job seeking for those interested in developing this skill. We intend to include parents in enrichment field trip experiences we will be providing the students.

In order to accomplish these activities, it is obvious that leadership is required - to create and impart in others the vision, to coordinate the various components necessary to realize a unity of purpose, to reach out to make the school all-inclusive with parents, neighborhood, and other agencies and institutions. We have talked with principals who have said they were doing many of these things we are suggesting, but closer observation reveals that the partnership we are talking about still isn't happening. No doubt these individuals know what they want to accomplish, but bringing it about requires more than wishing that it be so. We have visited schools which, on paper at least, have interesting and exciting things going on involving parents and community, but after spending up to a half day there, we failed to see any parents. What then is the difference between saying one wants these things to happen and the actuality of their happening? I believe it is in the leadership. Your participation in this conference is certainly one indicator that you want these kinds of things to happen. What can you then do to bring them about? Different leaders obviously work in differing ways, but I would, in closing, suggest the following as an example:(6)

A leader is best  
When people barely know that he exists,  
Not so good when people obey and acclaim him,  
Worst when they despise him.  
"Fall to honor people  
They fail to honor you";  
But of a good leader, who talks little,  
When his work is done, his aim fulfilled,  
They will all say, "We did this ourselves."

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